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THE  
NORTH-WEST

OF  
CANADA:

BEING  
A brief Sketch of the North-Western Regions,

AND A TREATISE ON THE

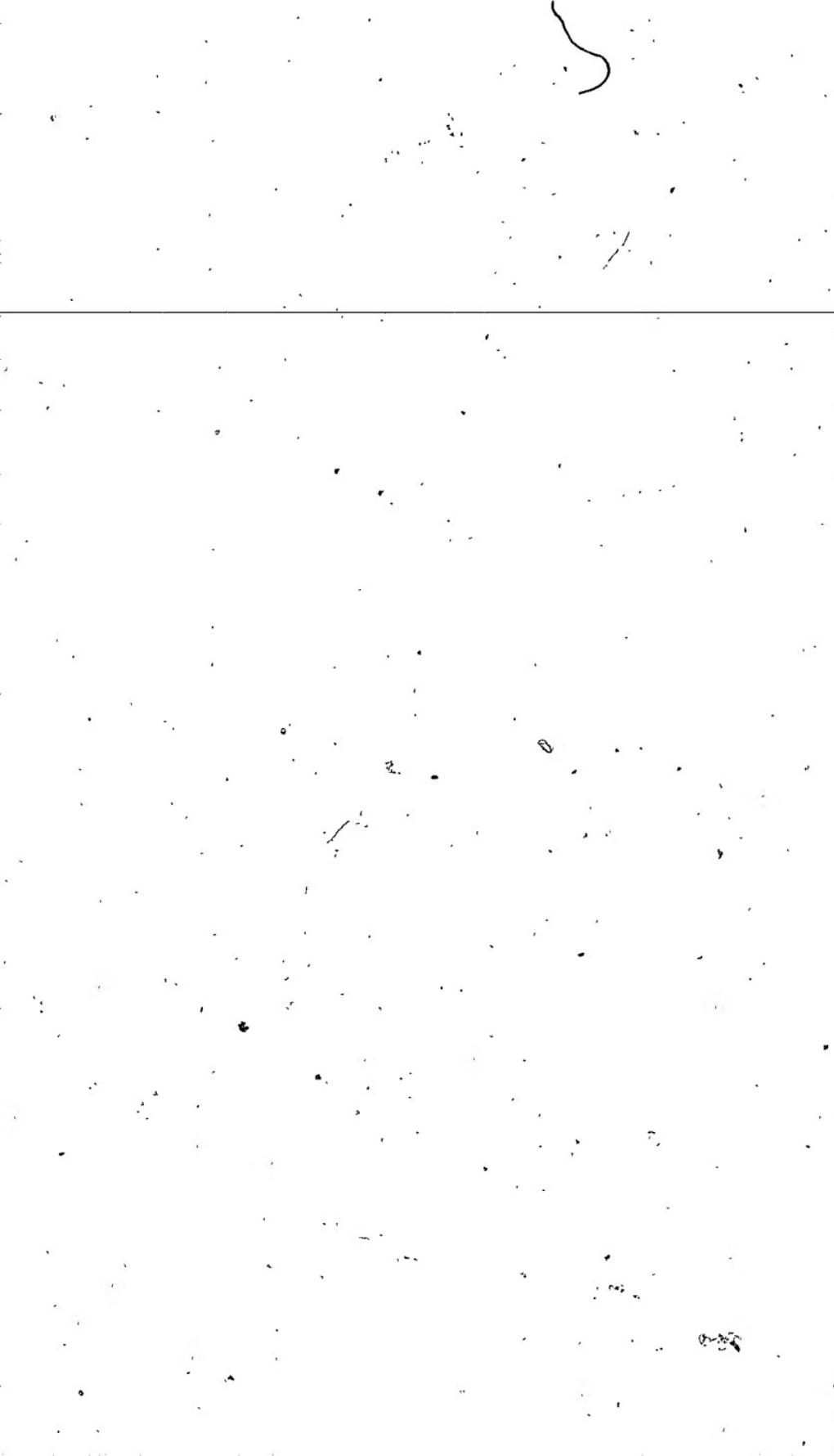
FUTURE RESOURCES OF THE COUNTRY.

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## THE "NORTH-WEST" OF THE DOMINION.

Now that the subject of emigration is beginning to attract the attention it deserves, a brief but comprehensive description of the immense territories inhabited at present by a comparatively few nomadic Indian tribes, will not be out of place, and may assist the efforts of our Emigration Agents in Great Britain and on the Continent of Europe, where the great majority of the population is yet in ignorance regarding the vast resources recently acquired by Canada by the transfer of the Hudson's Bay territories.

Before the acquisition of those immense regions, and the confederation of the Atlantic Provinces and British Columbia, Canada represented but an insignificant portion of the North American Continent; now her flag waves proudly over its best northern half; and she may justly claim possession of an empire rivaling in size and resources that of her southern neighbour.

The regions recently under the control of the Hudson's Bay Company, comprise a vast area: they embrace that portion of the continent lying north of old Canada, the United States, and British Columbia, and extend from east to west for a distance of three thousand miles, while from the shores of the Arctic Sea to the 49th parallel, they cover a breadth of about fourteen hundred miles, and include an area of nearly two and a quarter millions of square miles.

Of course, a very large portion of this territory is valueless for agriculture, still, the incalculable mineral wealth which doubtless lies hidden beneath the vast unexplored and otherwise worthless tracts lying in the northernmost parts of the Dominion, must ultimately prove of immense value.

Leaving out of the question those parts of British North America comprising old Canada and the Atlantic Provinces, the Dominion may be divided into five distinct sections, viz:

The Arctic Basin, Hudson's Bay, the Central Plains, the Rocky Mountains, and lastly, though by no means least, the Pacific Slope.

## THE ARCTIC BASIN

is bounded on the west by the Rocky Mountains which, from a point in the vicinity of Jasper House, form a distinct and well-defined boundary line northward, as far as the Arctic Sea.

An imaginary line from the same point (Jasper House), northeasterly to Lake Wollaston, and past it to the edge of the Silurian Basin of Hudson's Bay, will sufficiently mark the southern boundary, while thence to the head of Chesterfield Inlet, the eastern line of demarcation may be readily traced on any good map.

The Arctic Basin is drained by three great rivers: the Mackenzie (which, by its main feeder the Peace, also draws off a vast quantity of water from the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains), the Coppermine, and Back's Great Fish River.

Nine-tenths of this great basin is a barren and inhospitable wilderness; the eastern and smaller half lying on the granite rocks of the Laurentian system; the south-western extremity, however, which rests upon a more recent formation, presents the finest "*bit*" of territory in the British North-West. Of this comparatively small section watered by the Peace and Smoky rivers, I shall speak anon; in the meantime we shall proceed to a brief description of

### HUDSON'S BAY

The basin of this great inland sea, from Fort Churchill round to its southern extremity, and north again to the East Main river, is of Silurian formation, and the low margin, which is a distinct characteristic of the coast line within the limits just described, is covered with vast deposits of drift and boulders.

Northwards from the East Main river the formation changes, and the primary rocks of the Laurentian system, thence to the Hudson's Straits, present a frowning barrier to the icy waters of the northern sea.

Of that portion of the territories comprised within the Labrador Peninsula, and drained by rivers flowing westward into Hudson's Bay, also of the country adjacent to, and situated south and west of James' Bay, watered by the Abitibi, Moose, and Albany rivers, little can be said, for in general the land is

of the most inhospitable nature, and totally unfitted for cultivation, partly owing to the severity of the climate, and partly to the poor and swampy nature of the soil.

Wheat crops have never been raised at any of the Fur Company's posts bordering on the Bay, but vegetables succeed well at Rupert's House and Moose Factory; at the latter place especially, where the rich alluvial islands, upon one of which the factory is situated, offer a soil as rich as that of Red River, but the intense cold of winter and short duration of the summer interpose an effectual barrier to the cultivation of cereals.

The whole country around the shores of James' Bay, at the southern extremity of which is situated Moose Factory, is very slightly elevated above the sea level, and presents a vast and irreclaimable swamp covered with a thick, and sometimes stunted forest of spruce and tamarac, which find an insecure hold in the soft and moss-covered surface.

The low fringe of Silurian formation which encircles James Bay extends back in a southerly direction for seventy-five miles or thereabouts, until, above the Clay Falls on the Abitibi River, the "Otter's," (a series of cascades formed by the sudden dip and disappearance of the Laurentian rocks) are encountered; from this point southwards to the head waters of the Ottawa River, the country presents the appearance of a Canadian forest, but is generally level to within some forty miles of the height of land, when it is much cut up by picturesque lakes, and is considerably broken.

The season of navigation in Hudson's Bay is extremely short, being only of three or four months duration, and usually begins about 1st July, and closes towards the end of October, a period barely sufficient to permit the coasting craft of the Fur Company to perform more than four trips from the Great and Little Whale Rivers (on the Eastmain Coast, and in about latitude  $56\frac{1}{2}$ ° north) to Moose Factory and back.

During the month of July there is generally a great southerly drift of ice floes down the bay, a circumstance which renders navigation extremely hazardous.

Two ships annually visit Hudson's Bay. They usually arrive about the middle of August, and bring the bulk of the

Supplies requisite for the Indian trade of the northern and southern departments of Rupert's Land.

The coast line of James' Bay, and the sea bottom for many miles from the shore are strewn with drift boulders, and the extreme flatness of the land causes an extraordinary shoaliness of the water, which, at a distance of twenty and twenty-five miles from the shore, has a depth of from five to six fathoms only.

The expense and trouble attending the navigation of the solitary barque which visits Moose Factory once a year are, from this cause, almost incredible.

The London ship, after having passed into James' Bay, has to rely chiefly upon soundings, and on reaching the "outer ship hole," twenty-five miles from the Factory, the point selected for the lightening of the cargo before the bar can be crossed, land is nowhere visible.

In consequence of this dearth of landmarks, a beacon has been erected on the coast some eighteen miles north of the factory. This solitary beacon, a mast of great height, strongly stayed, and surmounted by a globular cage, twelve feet in diameter, has, of course, a known bearing from the outer anchorage, and in conjunction with the soundings, and a range of buoys and beacons stretching for many miles towards the "inner ship hole" at the mouth of the Moose River, is the only indication by which the vessel's position is known.

The consequences of a heavy gale from the northward with such a shallow sea to leeward when the ship is yet too deep to cross the bar of the river, may be easily imagined, and an anxious period, during which all the available coasting craft are busily employed in lightening the cargo, is usually passed. Once the ship's draught is sufficiently reduced to enable her to take the bar, a sloop is there stationed, and at the instant of high water a signal from that vessel conveys the intelligence to the anxious captain that he may now venture to *scrape* over the bar, which he hastens to do, provided the wind be fair. More than half a score miles of intricate navigation bring the vessel to the inner anchorage which is safe, but of very small extent. At this point (nine miles from the

Factory) the cargo is discharged into small vessels and taken up to the Factory.

This event of the London ship's arrival is the one exciting theme to the few white residents in James' Bay, and is always looked forward to with great interest. Immediately after the departure of the vessel with the furs of the Department, the buoys and beacons between the inner and outer anchorage, are carefully taken up and stored away at the Factory until the ensuing season, when they are again placed in their positions. Of course it is needless to remark that all this work is occasioned by the ice, which covers the sea for many miles out during the winter.

This description of the coast is applicable to the whole of James' Bay, and I believe that at York Factory, at the mouth of the Nelson River, similar drawbacks occur.

These circumstances preclude the possibility of ever forming good ports on Hudson's Bay, a scheme which has often been urged by enthusiasts who, not only wish to establish ports of entry in those inhospitable regions, but also desire to open up by railway communication, the very worst lands of the Dominion, viz.: those lying between the Bay and Lake Superior.

The pressing political necessity for a line of route through British territory available for the Canada Pacific, can be the only incentive for the disbursement of millions of dollars on the construction of a road which, between Mattawa and Fort Garry, must pass through several hundred miles of the least attractive lands on the continent. The writer has crossed the country alluded to on various occasions, both by canoe and on snowshoes, and is in a position to make the foregoing assertions.

The waters of Hudson's Bay are as unproductive as the dismal swamps they touch, for neither salmon nor any other valuable and edible fish is to be found. Seals and white porpoise are, or at least, have been, tolerably plentiful in the northern waters: but the latter, like the rabbits inland, would seem to migrate occasionally, and of late years they have disappeared entirely, the once valuable fisheries of Great and Little Whale Rivers being now quite unproductive.

In James' Bay vast salt marshes covered with luxuriant hay

extend for miles along the low lands bordering on the sea, and afford excellent feed for cattle, numbers of which are kept at the posts of Albany, Moose Factory, and Rupert's House. Game also abounds, and in the autumn when the countless flocks of geese return southward from their hyperborean retreats, thousands of these birds are slaughtered for food, fifty and sixty thousand salt geese being often barreled up at Albany for general consumption.

Having now briefly described the general features of the country around James' Bay, we shall proceed to an examination of the third division, which offers a much more inviting field, and to which I would call the attention of intending emigrants as containing within its limits the second best lands of the five sections into which I have divided the Nor'-West Territories.

### THE CENTRAL PLAINS,

the 96° of west longitude, from the 49th parallel northward to latitude 50½° being the eastern boundary of the newly-made Province of Manitoba, may also be taken as the extreme eastern limit of the plain country.

The 49th parallel being there the southern limit of the Dominion, the section under discussion will, as a matter of course, be bounded by the same line.

The Saskatchewan and its tributaries drain the country included in the north-western portion of this section.

This division contains at least three hundred thousand square miles. From Lake Manitoba to the eastern base of the Rocky Mountains, a distance of about seven hundred miles in a direct line, the prairies extend over a vast layer of drift which is the principal geological feature of this region.

From the Rocky Mountains eastward, the gradual subsidence of the sea at remote periods, may be sufficiently well traced by three distinct terraces or plateaux. The earliest well marked coast line is seen at the Grand Coteau, Eagle and Thickwood Hills.

The present valleys of the North and South Saskatchewan are cut through the high plateau of which those prominences are the commencement, while the prairie level at their base is

about sixteen hundred feet above the present sea level. At the period when the sea washed the base of this plateau the North and South Saskatchewan were probably independent rivers emptying their waters into the great bay formed by the Eagle, Thickwood and Thunder Breeding hills.

The second period of subsidence left a well defined coast line which may be traced from the Pembina mountain where an escarpment, two hundred and fifty feet above the prairie below, indicates the ancient coast. The edge of this plateau sweeps northwesterly to the Assiniboine and the Riding Mountains, which doubtless were formerly connected with the Duck, Porcupine and Basquia Hills, all elevated to the full height of the level, say sixteen hundred feet.

About twenty miles below Fort à la Corne on the Main Saskatchewan, the banks of that stream become suddenly reduced from their usual elevation to one very slightly raised above the river, thus marking the eastern edge of the plateau. This depression of the banks may likely offer an eligible locality for the crossing place of the Canada Pacific if the present Government of the Dominion elect to push that line by Lac la Biche and the Peace River.

The third and most recent level is that of the country around Lake Winnipeg and other lakes in its vicinity, as also of the low swampy land west of Lake Manitoba. According to Dr. Hector this level in the vicinity of Red River Settlement is composed of argillaceous marl. Underlying this is a bed of stiff clay. The upper layers of this deposit contain vegetable remains, and the whole marks a fresh water deposit indicating a time when the Winnipeg group of lakes covered a much more extended area than at present.

The Province of Manitoba, as originally laid out, is but of small extent, and is included within the  $96^{\circ}$  and  $99^{\circ}$  of west longitude, while it stretches northwards from the 49th parallel to latitude  $50\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ . This area contains about fourteen thousand square miles, and includes much of the most fertile land of the northwest.

The provincial surveys have, however, been very much extended westwards, and incoming settlers will always find

surveyed lands in quantity sufficient for their immediate wants.

The lands are generally laid out in square townships, measuring six miles on a side; those are again sub-divided into sections of six hundred and forty acres. Free grants of quarter sections (one hundred and sixty acres) are given to each *bona fide* settler. Land may also be purchased at the uniform rate of one dollar per acre.

Settlers on prairie lots are also entitled to a wood lot of twenty acres in the nearest locality.

Such are, I think, the regulations at present in force, with regard to the sale of lands within the Province of Manitoba.

Within the greater portion of the Province the land is of the very finest quality, and the yield something enormous. Splendid harvests of both grain and green crops are generally obtained.

Spring wheat is harvested at the rate of from thirty to forty bushels per acre, barley averages fifty bushels, and oats from sixty to seventy-five bushels per acre.

The fertility of the soil is so great in certain localities that beets, carrots, and other vegetables grow to an enormous size. Potatoes generally return immense crops which compare favorably with those grown in any part of Canada.

Good markets for farm produce are readily obtained, for the country as yet produces barely more than sufficient for home consumption. During the past summer (1873), the prices of grains were as follows: Wheat, \$1.50 per bushel; Oats, \$1.00; Barley, \$1.25, and Potatoes 75c. per bushel. Cattle thrive remarkably well in Manitoba, and are very numerous. Horses and cattle, notwithstanding the severity of the winter months, may generally winter out, although it is better to house them.

The natural pasturages of Manitoba are almost unlimited, while the nutritious character of the grasses enable both horses and cattle to thrive and fatten. Sheep would also, doubtless, do remarkably well in the western country; but the Province being, generally speaking, of a very level and uniform character, the more rolling country found to the westward would answer better for sheep farming.

The great disadvantages under which settlers labor are, the scarcity of wood and good fresh water.

There can be no doubt at all as to the great want of wood, and very few years will elapse ere coal must form the staple fuel of the country. Fortunately, that mineral is to be found in enormous quantities in the valley of the Saskatchewan. It has also been discovered in the Souris River, at the Roche Percée, about two hundred and fifty miles west-south-west from Fort Garry, and may there be obtained within a very few feet of the surface.

In localities far removed from large streams, the boring of artesian wells will probably result in the satisfactory solution of the water question.

The climate of Manitoba is remarkably salubrious. During the winter season the atmosphere is very dry, and from this cause, the low temperature which usually obtains, seldom produces any inconvenience. In summer, the heat is often intense, and is much the more felt owing to the great want of timber. Thunder and rain storms are of frequent occurrence, the former often extremely severe.

Immediately west of the Province, the valley of the Assiniboine and its tributaries present some of the very finest land for settlement. For a description of those fertile and beautiful tracts of country, I shall quote from Professor Hinds' interesting work.

Speaking of the areas fit for settlement, he says:—

*Valley of the Assiniboine.*—“Issuing from the Duck mountains are numerous streams which meander through a beautiful and fertile country. This area may be said to commence at the “Two Creeks,” ten miles from Fort Pelly, thence on to “Pine Creek,” fifteen miles further. The vegetation is everywhere luxuriant and beautiful, from the great abundance of rose bushes, vetches, and gaudy wild flowers of many species. After passing “Pine Creek,” the trail to Shell river pursues a circuitous route through a country of equal richness and fertility.

Shell river is forty-two miles from Pine Creek, and in its valley small oak appear, with balsam, poplar, and aspen,

covering a thick undergrowth of raspberry, currant, rose, and dogwood bushes.

Between Shell river and Birdstail river, a distance of thirty-nine miles, the country is level and often marshy, with numerous ponds and small lakes, but where the soil is dry, the herbage is very luxuriant, and groves of aspen thirty feet high vary the monotony of the plain.

Between the trail and the Assiniboine, the soil is light, and almost invariably as the river is approached, it partakes of a sandy and gravelly nature, with boulders strewn over its surface.

The flanks of the Riding mountain are covered with a dense growth of aspen and poplar, and cut by numerous small rivulets. From Birdstail river to the little Saskatchewan, or Rapid river, a distance of thirty-three miles, the same kind of soil, timber, and vegetation prevail.

About one hundred miles from its mouth, the Rapid river issues from the densely wooded flanks of the Riding mountain through a narrow excavated valley filled with balsam poplar, and an undergrowth of cherry and dogwood, with roses, convolvuli, vetches, and various creepers. The slopes are covered with poplar eighteen inches in diameter. Descending the river, groves of poplar and spruce show themselves, with thick forests of aspen and balsam poplar covering the terrace on either hand. The river is here forty feet wide, with a very rapid current. Before it makes its easterly bend, the ash leaved maple shows itself in groves, and on both sides is an open undulating country, attractive and fertile, with clumps of young trees springing up in all directions.

The region drained by the Rapid river continues beautiful and rich until within twenty-five miles of the Assiniboine, so that it may with propriety be stated, that for a distance of seventy-five miles this river meanders through a country admirably adapted for settlement.

Ponds and lakes are numerous; wild fowl in great numbers breed on their borders, and the waters of the Rapid river abound in fish. It will probably become important as a means of conveying to the settlements on the Assiniboine and Red River supplies of lumber from its valley and the Riding mountain.

From the Rapid river to White Mud river the distance is thirty-three miles, and the country continues to preserve the same general character with respect to fertility and fitness for settlement which has now been traced out for a space of 164 miles.

White Mud river flows into Lake Manitoba at its southwestern extremity. This river drains an extensive area of the richest prairie land, similar in all respects to the White Horse Plain on the Assiniboine, or the rich wastes on Red River.

White Mud river is connected with the Prairie Portage by an excellent dry road, the crossing place being eighteen miles from the Portage.

The river banks are well timbered with oak, elm, ash, maple, aspen, and balsam poplar.

The soil on its banks and far on either side is of the finest quality.

*Valley of the Saskatchewan.*—1st. The country between the Lumpy Hill of the woods and Fort à la Corne, including the Valley of Long Creek and the region west of it, bounded by the South Branch and the main Saskatchewan. This area may contain about 600,000 acres of land of the first quality.

2nd. The valley of Carrot river and the country included between it and the main Saskatchewan, bounded on the south by the Birch Hill range. There is a narrow strip on the Great river, about five miles broad, where the soil is light and of an indifferent quality. The area of available land probably does not exceed 3,000,000 acres.

3rd. The country about the Moose Woods on the South Branch.

4th. The Touchwood Hill range.

5th. The Pheasant Hill and the File Hill.

The aggregate area of these fertile districts may be stated to extend over 500,000 acres.

Assuming that the prairies of Red River and the Assiniboine east of Prairie Portage contain an available area of 1,500,000 acres of fertile soil, the total quantity of arable land included

between Red River and the Moose Woods on the south branch of the Saskatchewan, will be as follows:—

	Acres.
Red River and Assiniboine prairies, east of Portage ..	1,500,000
Eastern watershed of Assiniboine and Riviere Sale ...	3,500,000
Long Creek and Forks of the Saskatchewan .....	600,000
Between Carrot river and the Main Saskatchewan....	3,000,000
Touchwood Hill range, Moose Woods, &c.....	500,000
Moose river, Q'Appelle river, White Sand river .....	1,000,000
Headwaters of Assiniboine and Swan river valley ...	1,000,000

Total area of arable land of first quality..... 11,100,000

a Of land fit for grazing purposes, the area is much more considerable, and may be assumed equal in extent to the above estimate of arable land."

The foregoing short description of "*areas fit for settlement*" will be seen to include the lands east of the Forks of the Saskatchewan, and the South Branch as far as Moose Woods only. Large fertile tracts are to be found near Carleton and along the North Branch for many miles of its course. Also at and in the vicinity of the Eagle hills, and the elbow of the North Saskatchewan.

Between the South Saskatchewan and Battle River (the largest southern tributary of the north branch), there is a very extensive area of semi-desert country, devoid of wood, and of scanty herbage. This barren tract extends westward from the edge of the first prairie steppe marked by the Eagle Hills and Thunder Breeding Hills, and it almost reaches the Hand Hills and south elbow of the Battle River, enclosing an arid region perhaps 7000 square miles in extent.

Along the North Saskatchewan and Battle River there is, however, much fine land, which is also tolerably wooded.

The semicircular area included between the 53rd. parallel of latitude and the North Saskatchewan, also contains some beautiful and fertile country, generally of an undulating nature, but sometimes much broken, and, as a rule, very scantily clothed with timber. Within this zone, localities favorable for farming occur, more especially in the northern part, where the Hay Lakes, Beaver Hills and Lakes, also the Egg Hills, all situated within fifty miles of Edmonton, offer a fine field for settlement

and stock-raising. Those localities possess much rich soil and a luxuriant pasturage; but the hilly and exposed prairies which occupy the larger and southern portion of this section present by no means an inviting aspect for permanent settlement. Wood is extremely scarce; water occasionally wanting, and when found, is too often brackish.

The country north of the North Saskatchewan in point of fertility, compares favorably with any to the south of the same river, and is much better timbered.

From Fort à la Corne, west north-westerly towards Lac la Biche, the land is of good quality and generally well wooded, besides being watered by numerous lakes abounding in fish.

The climate of this section of the country is fully as mild as that of the more open tracts to the south, and there is every reason to think that the stream of emigration will naturally follow in this direction.

Two powerful reasons point to this conclusion:

Emigrants will, *caeteris paribus*, most naturally seek to locate their homes where wood and water are to be found in sufficient quantities. Proximity to the line of the great inter-oceanic highway will be another desideratum, and many causes point to the probable selection of a northern route for the binding link between British Columbia and the Eastern Provinces.

The Saskatchewan valley will however always offer inducements to intending settlers, and no doubt, in the future, Edmonton will become the nucleus of one of the secondary towns of the north-west.

The Red Deer, Bow and Belly rivers drain a beautiful and most fertile region, but its great distance from known centres and the unsatisfactory state of Indian affairs in that quarter may possibly retard for some time, the settlement of this inviting country.

West of Edmonton and the upper part of the north Saskatchewan, the country is swampy and densely timbered, offering but poor inducements to the emigrant. In fact, the North Saskatchewan River, from the  $114^{\circ}$  of west longitude, is the boundary between the *fertile belt* and the swampy wilder-

ness which intervenes between that river and the Rocky Mountains.

Lac la Biche situated in  $111\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  west longitude, and about seventy miles due north of the North Saskatchewan, is a magnificent sheet of water abounding in fish, and is surrounded by a finely timbered country. The Roman Catholic Mission has there established a flourishing station, where farming is carried on with great success. Wheat is cultivated, and that staple is supplied by this establishment to many other outlying posts of the mission.

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About one hundred and seventy miles west from Lac la Biche is situated a Hudson's Bay Co's Post, near the western extremity of Lesser Slave Lake, a large body of water, seventy miles in length, and also teeming with the finest fish.

For this distance, (one hundred and seventy miles), a dense forest of tamarac, spruce and poplar interposes the only obstacle to wheeled vehicles between Fort Garry and the beautiful and fertile country *drained by the Peace and Smoky Rivers.*

"This *south-western section of the Arctic Basin*," presents without exception, the finest grazing and agricultural portion of the North-West territories, and probably comprehends an area equal in extent to Manitoba, and may be, exceeds that Province in size.

Immense quantities of coal lie beneath the rich uplands of this beautiful country, which is also sufficiently timbered to meet all the necessities of the pioneers of civilization.

The climate of that portion of the Peace River country, lying between the parallels of  $55^{\circ}$  and  $56\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  north latitude, and between the  $116^{\circ}$  meridian and the Rocky Mountains, is extremely salubrious, the winters being dry and temperature moderate.

Although Dunvegan, a Post of the Hudson's Bay Company's, situated upon the Peace River, is, about thirteen degrees of latitude north of Toronto, yet, during the open season, the mean temperatures of those two places do not vary by more than a degree of Fahrenheit.

This extraordinary mildness of climate must be ascribed to the position of this piece of country which lies immediately to leeward of the sheltering peaks of the Rocky Mountains.

The westerly vapour-laden winds of the Pacific, before reaching the eastern slopes of the mountains, lose, by precipitation, a great portion of their moisture, and being divested of their vapour screen, permit both solar and terrestrial radiation to take place more freely in the regions immediately to leeward.

Certainly in point of climate, and depth of snow during the winter months, the Peace River country is much superior to the Saskatchewan country; for, in the former, snow never packs, and rarely attains a depth greater than twenty-four inches.

From careful observations made by Professor Macoun in the fall of 1872, the vegetation, grasses, wild fruits and timber of this favored region, indicate a climate nearly as warm as that of Belleville, in Ontario.

Here, then, lies a field for the emigrant which might be reached from Red River by wheeled vehicles, did not the one hundred and seventy miles of forest, intervening between Lesser Slave Lake Post and Lac la Biche, present a serious obstacle.

As matters now stand, unless the round about and expensive canoe route of the Hudson's Bay Company were made use of, that veritable "Garden of Eden" still remains beyond the reach of the white man.

Of course, to travellers journeying through the country, with few or no impediment, as did the writer, there is no difficulty whatever; but the emigrant who leaves Fort Garry with all his worldly goods packed in carts, and is besides encumbered with a family, and must seek an economical mode of travel, cannot think of attempting to penetrate further north than Lac la Biche, to which, however, easy access is now to be had from the Red River Settlement.

The probability that the route of the Canada Pacific Railway will be directed through the Peace River country, offers the only solution to the difficulty, and presents a key to this beautiful country.

As soon as the route is located and the forest cleared for the railway line, a very trifling additional expense would enable

a road, passable for the Red River cart, to be cut out. In fact, such must be done in order to carry on the work of construction, for a good cart road must accompany the railway line for obvious reasons.

The post of Lesser Slave Lake being once reached, the difficulty of getting to the Smoky River, sixty or seventy miles distant, would be trifling, and that point arrived at, the vast and fertile region south of the Peace River, would be within the emigrant's grasp.

To reach the Peace River by any route other than that described (which will keep to the north of Lesser Slave Lake), would be impossible, for the route followed by the writer, from Fort Assiniboine to Lesser Slave Lake, is almost impracticable, excepting for pack trains.

That a passage through or over the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, *via* the Peace River country, can be found, is nearly certain; either by a pass, to which attention has already been drawn, or, failing that, by a route following the valley of the Peace River, which, although extremely circuitous, and in all likelihood, difficult of construction, nevertheless, passes *through the Rocky Mountain Range at an elevation not exceeding sixteen or eighteen hundred feet above sea level*.

Two very cogent reasons may be given for the proposition to take the Canada Pacific Railway by and through the Peace River country. Such a route, although perhaps a trifle longer than one by the Tete Jaune Cache pass, would open up the finest region of the North-west, and would render it unnecessary to approach the Frazer River; both considerations of no mean importance.

The snow difficulty would also be, in a great measure, avoided by that route, and in the whole distance from Fort Garry to a point in the vicinity of Quesnel, the construction of heavy bridges would be required *only at the main Saskatchewan (say twenty miles below Fort à la Corne), at the River Athabasca, the Smoky River, and the south branch of the Peace*.

Many other powerful arguments might be adduced in favor of this northern route, but as we do not purpose entering into the railway question, its further discussion may be deferred.

But we have spoken of only a very limited portion of the Peace River country. From what is known of the territory lying north of the Peace up to Fort Liard in latitude 60°, the fitness for agriculture of the triangular area bounded by the Peace River as far as latitude 60°, the Rocky Mountains, and the parallel of 60° may be safely assumed.

At Fort Liard wheat has been grown, while barley, oats, and potatoes generally yield fair returns.

From Dunvegan on the Peace River, to Great Slave Lake is only a distance of three hundred and fifty miles in air line. The country intervening is of an easy character and partly prairie.

From Portage des Noyés on the Slave River, to Fort Simpson, the Mackenzie river presents a splendid stream navigable for vessels of considerable burden, say schooners of one hundred tons or so.

From Fort Simpson to the sea, the Mackenzie will float the largest frigate.

The Mackenzie river country abounds in coal, and the Arctic Sea at the mouth of that magnificent stream, harbours within its depths, cetacea yielding the finest oil, and in the pursuit of which our American neighbours send fleets of many vessels.

Here then is yet another field for Canadian enterprise. The Canada Pacific once built, and passing within three hundred and fifty miles of the Mackenzie River would help to build up a trade in oil and coal, of no insignificant proportions ; for the construction of a branch line from the vicinity of Dunvegan to the Mackenzie would not be difficult.

But the Athabasca might be utilized for purposes of transportation, and by the help of a short line of road from the uppermost to the lowermost rapids in the Slave River, a distance of, say sixty miles, craft of moderate size could ascend the Athabasca to the crossing place of the Canada Pacific Railroad, and by this route bring the products of the Arctic Seas and the minerals of the Mackenzie River district to the cars.

By some, these speculations may be thought chimerical, but the Canada Pacific Railroad itself is by many classed among

the delusions of the day, and if the one be feasible, why not the other?

Why should not the Dominion of Canada, like Russia, possess an Archangel?

At Fort Simpson in latitude  $64^{\circ} 32'$  north, situated at the junction of the River of the Mountains with the Mackenzie, and about seven hundred miles from the sea, a town may eventually spring up where fleets of small fishing vessels will be fitted out for the prosecution of the rich whale-fisheries at the mouth of this great river.

If it pays the Americans to send out large fleets through Behring's Straits for the same object, how much more profitable would it not be, (supposing the Canada Pacific Railway completed to Lac la Biche, even) to convey the Arctic products by the route indicated.

Such an accession to the traffic of the Inter-oceanic railroad would be highly profitable.

I commend the scheme to the consideration of the Hon. John Young, the originator of many commercial enterprises, and one well qualified to judge as to the feasibility of such a channel of communication.

The value of the exports of Archangel, twenty-five years ago, was nearly one million and-a-half sterling; her products were, timber, iron, flax, hemp and tallow. Her situation is much further north than Fort Simpson, her seasons shorter, and the navigation of her waters more precarious than that of the Mackenzie River.

Archangel can boast but of one good month in the year, i. e. from 15th July to 15th August; her shortest day is of only three hours duration.

The region south of Fort Simpson is quite capable of producing the grain, tar, tallow, etc., enumerated among the exports of the Russian port, besides the coal, oil, and ivory of the Lower Mackenzie.

A fleet of steam vessels could leave Fort Simpson in the beginning of June, and reaching the Arctic in a few days, commence the fisheries, and return about the end of September.

The branch road of three hundred and fifty miles would connect with the Canada Pacific near the Peace River, or the interrupted route, via Lake and River Athabasca, might be used for the same purpose.

Immediately west of the Peace River country,

### THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

interpose their hoary summits, but nature has formed a navigable channel of communication through their rocky walls, in the upper portion of the Peace River, which flows smoothly and almost uninterruptedly for many miles over beds of limestone exhibiting fossils of the carboniferous period.

The low altitude at which the Peace River flows through the Rocky Mountains is certainly a most wonderful phenomenon, and at first would naturally lead to the belief that there is an easy solution to the passage of the Mountains. That river can certainly be navigated with ease, especially in the autumn months, but its valley does not present a very good route for wheeled vehicles or a railroad.

I shall not here enter into a description of this pass, but the reader, if desirous to learn more, is referred to a work now in the press, and shortly to be published, entitled "Westward, by the Peace to the Pacific," wherein the subject is more fully discussed.

Although the Rocky Mountains do not afford land fit for cultivation, they contain minerals such as gold and silver, and doubtless at no very remote period they will become vast mining centres, and will afford a wide field for enterprise.

It will be here unnecessary to speak of British Columbia; the resources of that rich Province have been already tested by other writers, and the comprehensive report of the late Minister of Public Works, Mr. Langevin, has quite exhausted the subject.

The capabilities of British Columbia can be summed up in a few words. Her gold mines have proved to be among the richest on the Pacific Slopes of the Continent; while the new mining regions of the Upper Branches of the Peace River promise fair to attain a golden celebrity.

Her salmon fisheries, lumbering capabilities, and cattle ranches will soon give her a prominence among the many rich Provinces of the Dominion, while the vast beds of coal which underlie not only Vancouver Island, but a great portion of the mainland, will ultimately serve to build up a Newcastle on the Pacific.

Already the Californians have found out the superiority of the Nanaimo coal over that of their own territory, and American shipping now exports large quantities of the mineral to San Francisco.

The Islands of Queen Charlotte adjacent to the northern coast of British Columbia, are also of great importance, and contain coal, copper and gold, and thitherward the hardy gold seekers have already began to extend their operations.

The greater portion of British Columbia is yet unexplored and the parts now known are excessively mountainous, the narrow and generally confined valleys alone offering workable arable lands. Vast tracts of country, especially in the northern parts of the Province, are utterly useless unless for their mineral wealth which is probably unlimited.

When we compare the beautiful regions of the Central Plains, and the Peace River east of the mountains, with this western province, the conviction is reluctantly forced upon the mind that it cannot honestly be held up to the Emigrant as a field for Agriculture. However, the Dominion possesses elsewhere unlimited tracts of rich country which, for years to come will absorb the irresistible flow of emigration, while on the other hand, the growth of manufacturing establishments, arising out of the rich mineral wealth of the Pacific Slope, will build up British Columbia, and enable her to maintain a foremost rank among the provinces of the great Dominion.

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## OUR GREAT NOR'WEST.

BY CHARLES HOERZKY.

*The following extract from the "Ottawa Citizen" of 24th October last (1873) may prove of interest, and elucidate the scheme or proposition for taking the Canada Pacific Road by a northern route:*

At the present juncture, when the Canada Pacific Railway scandal is occupying the attention of legislators and the public generally, it may not be amiss to offer some remarks upon the route or routes available for the very important highway destined not only to bring the remote shores of the Dominion within easy reach, but also to open up the vast and now unoccupied lands of the North West.

That the route across the Rocky Mountains *via*

### THE TETE JAUNE CACHE

will be finally adopted, or if chosen, that it will fulfil the conditions requisite to meet the emergency of the case, is *not* the general belief.

Against the selection of that route, there appear to be two rather powerful arguments; first, the difficulty of reaching the Bute Inlet from the Tete Jaune Cache, and, secondly, the inadaptation of the section of country east of the Rocky Mountains crossed by that line, for successful and permanent settlement.

In order to reach this momentous question without circumlocution, we shall at once enter into a comparison between the route projected *via* the Tete Jaune Cache pass and

### ONE PROPOSED BY THE WRITER,

by way of Lac la Biche and the Peace river, crossing the Rocky Mountain range either by a supposed practicable and low pass, situated in about latitude  $55\frac{1}{2}$  N., or, through the comparatively low gap in the Rocky Mountains by which the great Peace river finds its way from the British Columbian slopes at an

elevation of about 1,600 feet above sea level, to the eastern side of the range.

Before going further, let us premise that Bute Inlet is the point on the Pacific coast which it is most desirable for the line to reach in order at some future and not far distant period to bring Vancouver Island and Victoria into direct communication with the interior of the continent.

*Taking it for granted* that a practicable route does exist from the Tete Jaune Cache *via* the North Frazer and Fort George to Bute Inlet (a distance of 450 miles) or from the Tete Jaune Cache to the same point *via* Lac la Hache (also 450 miles), both distances taken from Progress Report of 1872; see page 17, we shall at once discuss the merits of that section of the Canada Pacific comprised between Portage la Prairie (Manitoba) and the Cache.

From Portage la Prairie in a nor'-west direction and for a distance of about 220 miles, the projected route passes over a very fine country; in the vicinity of the pretty poplar wooded Riding Mountains, to the south, and almost within reach of the beautiful Lake Dauphin, and over the Swan river, until, when between the Thunder and Porcupine hills, it takes a westward course for the Saskatchewan, distant 192 miles.

We shall now make the

#### THUNDER HILL

a common point of departure for the two routes under discussion, for east of that prominence, the line has passed over the best available ground.

Resuming then our course for the Tete Jaune Cache, we strike almost due west, for 192 miles over a very easy country, but for the most part open, sparsely wooded, and containing many lakes, of which the waters are saturated with the sulphate of soda.

From the crossing of the South Saskatchewan to that of the northern branch of the same river at the White Mud Creek above Edmonton, 350 miles of country are crossed, nine-tenths of which is a treeless prairie, exposed to the fury of the cold northern blasts, rough and broken in many places, where good fresh water, excepting in the vicinity of the rivers, is extremely

scarce, salt and brackish lakes of frequent occurrence, and very much frequented by the nomadic tribes of the plains.

Crossing the North Saskatchewan, we now leave the open plain country, and enter a vast swampy region, which, with the exception of some few dry ridges, extends to the Athabasca river.

As a matter of course, this tract of country (which the line intersects for a distance of some 170 miles), is wet, cold, and quite

#### UNSUITABLE FOR SUCCESSFUL SETTLEMENT.

From the Southern end of Lac Brûlé, which we have now reached, about one hundred miles take us to the Cache, which distance can be overcome by easy grades.

A great portion of the section of country just described, offers immense tracts of fine land suitable (so far as the *soil itself* is concerned) for both agriculture and grazing purposes. But the drawbacks already briefly referred to, viz.: the scarcity of wood and water, are insuperable obstacles in the way of successful and permanent settlement.

It is true that occasionally small copses of poplars (the trees rarely exceeding eight inches in diameter) are met with, nevertheless the extent of wooded, compared with prairie land is so disproportionate, that but a widely scattered community of settlers would be needed to clear off all the available timber in a few years.

On the score of

#### FUEL,

it may be urged that the coal which under-lies a great extent of the Upper Saskatchewan country may offer a good substitute for wood and be used to advantage. There is no doubt that coal in quantities enormous, is to be found, especially west of Fort Pitt, but, those who seek these regions with a view to settlement, cannot be expected to turn all their attention and devote all their energies towards the painful and laborious extraction from the bowels of the earth, of the wherewithal to

#### KEEP BODY AND SOUL TOGETHER

during the long and severe winters which are the rule, when the thermometer often sinks to 40° below zero.

It is one thing to cross those beautiful prairies during the summer season, when the hills and dales are in the full flush of exuberant verdure, another to travel them in winter in face of the biting northern blasts which sweep the boundless wastes of these interminable plains with a rigor and severity almost arctic in their intensity.

We shall now return to the Thunder Hill, the point where the proposed route to the Pacific,

**VIA LAC LA BICHE AND PEACE RIVER,**

branches northwards from the one just described. Travelling west northwesterly for about one hundred and fifty miles *within the limit of the true forest*, we reach Fort a la Corne. Somewhere in this vicinity a crossing of the Saskatchewan must be sought, and gaining the north side of that river, the line of route would cross the Netsetting river, and keeping south of Green and Pelican lakes, seek the easiest way in Lac la Biche through a *thick wood country*, supporting a growth of spruce, larch and poplars, abounding in lakes teeming with fish, and removed from the presence of the roving Indians of the plains.

From Lac la Biche, (in latitude 55° N., where wheat has been successfully cultivated for years) to the western extremity of Lesser Slave Lake, is a distance of about 170 miles, through a fairly level country covered with forest. This section is comparatively unknown, but from Indian reports, is presumed to be level.

From this point, sixty-five miles of fine, gently-rolling timbered country will take the line to the Smoky river, which can be crossed some thirty miles from its mouth.

From the last mentioned river the line would intersect and open up

**A VAST AND FERTILE REGION,**

situated to the south of the great Peace River—a region comprising an area equal in extent to Manitoba, well wooded, with abundance of water, of excellent soil, and in all probability possessing unlimited quantities of good coal. The general elevation of this large tract of country is about 1,800 feet above sea level. The climate is most salubrious, and by all accounts,

as mild if not milder than that of Red River. On the extensive plains bordering upon the Peace river, both north and south of it, snow never exceeds two feet in depth, and *never packs*. Up to the month of December,

**THE PLAINS ARE OFTEN NEARLY BARE,**

and although winter usually sets in with the month of November, the early-opening of the spring in April compensates for the short fall.

I shall here give several extracts from a letter written by a gentleman of reliability who has lived in the Peace river country for seven years. Speaking of the climate he says:—

“ Le climat est certainement salubre. Les vents qui regnent “ en maître ne sont généralement pas froids, ils soufflent presque “ toujours de l’ouest à l’est, et sud-ouest au nord est. Les orages “ ne font point de dégâts. En hiver même, la température est “ très variée, ce n’est que dans le mois de Janvier et une partie “ de Mars que quand le vent est nord, il fait bien froid.

“ A Athabasca, au contraire, le froid est intense et de longue “ durée. La neige n’atteint ordinairement pas plus que deux “ pieds, eucoré n’est elle pas dure, l’air étant toujours sec et “ le ciel serein.

“ Dans les cotes, dans les prairies, la nature offre une foule “ de fruits que les Européens même ne dédaigneraient pas sur “ leurs tables. Les poires, des cerises sauvages, des pembina, “ des raisins d’ours, des froises, des framboises. . . . . il me “ semble que le pommier réussirait. L’orge murit tous les ans. “ Je pense que le ble sème en automne murirait très souvent, “ comme le ble du printemps. Une année j’ai sème des haricots “ de 24 de Mai, le 30 de Juillet ils étaient bons à manger. Les “ pois réussissent généralement, légumes toujours bien.” Of

**THE MINERAL RESOURCES**

he says, “ In many places tar exudes from the ground. The “ purest and whitest of salt can be collected in enormous quan- “ tities. Pure sulphur is found below Fort Vermilion. Bitum- “ inous springs abound, while the Smoky river, as its name “ indicates, proves the existence of vast beds of pit coal.”

This magnificent country; rich in mineral wealth, with abundance of timber, possessing millions of acres of the finest

pasture land, watered by numerous small rivers, is intersected by the noble Peace River, navigable, from the Rocky Mountain Portage, to the Smoky river (a distance of 250 miles) and probably very much further, for the *largest river steamers*.

We shall now once more pick up the line of route, and keeping a little south of west, cross the Rocky Mountains by the

PINE RIVER SUMMIT LAKE PASS,

if it be practicable. It, on the contrary, insurmountable obstacles impede our progress in that direction, we must keep to the right, heading the Pine river sufficiently to enable us to cross it at the most eligible point, and make for the Peace River Valley, by following which, and making a detour of 125 miles, we shall reach McLeod Lake, after having passed through the Rocky Mountains at an elevation rarely exceeding 1,800 feet above the sea. This detour may, however, necessitate very heavy works of construction, the Pine river, owing to its deep valley, being itself probably the first serious obstacle. Between this river and the upper end of the portage, (probably thirty miles), the country is a dense forest, and apparently rough. The White Fish river has besides perhaps to be crossed. Above the portage, and partly within the mountains, there are sixty or seventy miles of rough and expensive road to be constructed, occasional level terraces can be made use of, but precipitous mountain sides, especially above the

"RAPIDE QUI NE PARLE PAS,"

will occasion heavy and expensive work, while the tortuousness of the river may require many bridges.

The waters of the Peace river *above the portage*, being, however, navigable for stern wheel steamers of light draught (some slight improvement being made at the Finlay rapids) as far as the outlet of McLeod lake, would greatly simplify the operation of road making by furnishing cheap and easy means of transport along 145 miles of the line of route.

From McLeod lake, or its vicinity, 140 miles of country, chiefly unavailable for farming purposes, in some places rough, for a great part level, and probably nowhere exceeding 2,400

feet above the sea, will bring the line to Black or West road river, whence the famed Chilcoten valley, and thence

THE BUTE INLET,

may be reached.

When we consider that the line just pointed out is *via* The Pine River Summit Lake Pass only fifty miles longer than that by the Tete Jaune Cache, or, the Pine Pass being impracticable, that the route, via the circuitous Peace river valley and the Parsnip only exceeds by 180 miles the Yellow Head Pass route, that it will pass out of the region of deep snow, and open up the best and most available country of the Nor'-West east of the Rocky Mountains, for settlement, avoiding much rough country and

THE HIDEOUS FRAZER RIVER

altogether, there can be no doubt as to *the most eligible line for the great Interoceanic highway*, to give it the conditions essential to its success as a commercial and political undertaking.



**Canadian Pacific Railway Route, via Tête Jaune Cache.**

**Canadian Pacific Railway Route, via Peace River.**

ROUTE.	REMARKS.	Miles.	Elevation.	ROUTE.	REMARKS.	Miles.
From Portage in Prairie to Thunder Hill .....	Fine country for settlement .....	220		From Portage la Prairie to Thunder Hill .....	Fine country for settlement .....	220
From Thunder Hill to the crossing of the South Saskatchewan .....	Much open country salt lakes, little wood .....	192		From Thunder Hill to Fort à la Corne .....	Fine country, for the most part wooded .....	150
From South Saskatchewan to crossing near the White Mud .....	Nearly all open country, salt lakes, hilly and much exposed .....	350		From Fort à la Corne to Lac la Biche .....	Thick Wood country, many lakes abounding in fish .....	350
From White Mud to South end of Lac Brûlé .....	Swampy, cold, unfertilized for settlement .....	170		From Lac la Biche to West end of Lesser Slave Lake .....	Wooded country, not much known but reported level .....	170
From Lac Brûlé to the Tête Jaune Cache .....	Unsuitable for agriculture .....	110	360 ft	From West end Lesser Slave Lake to Smoky River .....	Fine country, well wooded and watered .....	65
From Tête Jaune Cache to Bute Inlet, either by Lac la Hache or the North Fraser River and Fort George and Chilcotin .....	The Chilcotin Valley is the only available district for settlement in this section .....	450		From Smoky River to Pine River Summit Lake .....	Beautiful country, prairie, woods, coal .....	170
				From Pine River Summit Lake to Lake McLeod .....	Not available for agriculture .....	60
				From Lake McLeod to Queenel .....	Very little of it available for agriculture .....	140
				From Queenel to Bute Inlet via Chilcotin .....	(?) .....	220
						1545

63 miles shorter than the Peace River route, *via* Pine River Summit Lake.

178 miles shorter than the route through the Peace River Valley.